

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of identifying a biological sample associated with a container comprising the steps of:

obtaining a container having an outer surface;

5 systematically providing said container with a universally unique identifier, as part of its manufacture locating said biological sample in said container.

2. The method in accordance with Claim 1, wherein said identifier comprising one or more first areas on said outer surface of said container having a first specular reflectance which differs from a second specular reflectance of a second area adjacent said first area; and

said first specular reflectance is greater than said second specular reflectance.

3. The method in accordance with Claim 2, wherein said providing step comprises laser etching said outer surface of said container to define said one or more first areas.

4. The method in accordance with Claim 2, wherein said providing step comprises abrading said outer surface of said container to define said one or more first areas.

5. The method in accordance with Claim 1, wherein said first specular reflectance is less than said second specular reflectance.

6. The method in accordance with Claim 5, wherein said providing step comprises melting said outer surface to define said one or more first areas.

5 7. The method in accordance with Claim 1, further including the step of detecting said one or more first areas of said outer surface of said container.

10 8. The method in accordance with Claim 6, wherein said step of detecting comprises the steps of projecting light towards said outer surface of said container from a source and sensing light reflected by said container from said source.

15 9. A method of identifying a container comprising the steps of:
obtaining a container having an outer surface;
marking said outer surface of said container with a unique identifier comprising one or more areas having a first specular reflectance that differs from a second specular reflectance of said outer surface adjacent said one or more areas;

detecting said identifier; and

associating said identifier with one or more items of information pertaining to use, or planned use, of the container.

20 10. The method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein said first specular reflectance is less than said second specular reflectance.

11. The method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein said marking step comprises laser etching said outer surface of said container to define said one or more areas.

12. The method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein said marking
5 step comprises abrading said outer surface of said container to define said one or more areas.

13. The method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein said first specular reflectance is greater than said second specular reflectance.

14. The method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein said marking
10 step comprises melting said outer surface to define said one or more areas.

15. The method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein said marking step comprises applying a thin film member to said outer surface of said container.

16. The method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein said step of
15 detecting comprises the steps of projecting light towards said outer surface of said container from a source and sensing light reflected by said one or more areas and said outer surface adjacent thereto.

17. A uniquely identifiable container, said container having an outer
surface with an area having a first specular reflectance and an identifier
20 associated with said container, said identifier comprising an identifying surface having a second specular reflectance that differs from said first specular reflectance.

18. The container in accordance with Claim 17, wherein said container contains a biological sample.

19. The container in accordance with Claim 17, wherein said first specular reflectance is greater than said second specular reflectance.

5 20. The container in accordance with Claim 17, wherein said container has a top and a bottom and said identifying surface extends around said outer surface of said container between said top and said bottom.

10 21. The container in accordance with Claim 17, wherein said container has a top and a bottom and an axis extending through said top and said bottom, and wherein said identifying surface has the shape of a bar.

22. The container in accordance with Claim 21, wherein said bar extends perpendicular to said axis.

15 23. The container in accordance with Claim 21, wherein said bar extends parallel to said axis.

24. The container in accordance with Claim 17, wherein said identifying surface is substantially translucent.

20 25. The container in accordance with Claim 17, wherein a number of identifying surfaces are spaced from one another on said outer surface of said container.

26. A system for uniquely identifying a biological sample comprising a container having an outer surface having a first specular reflectance, an identifier associated with said container, said identifier defining a surface having a second specular reflectance that differs from said first specular reflectance, and a detection apparatus for detecting said identifier.

27. The system in accordance with Claim 26, wherein said detection apparatus comprises at least one light emitter and one light detector.

28. The system in accordance with Claim 26, wherein said container comprises a test tube.

29. The system in accordance with Claim 26, wherein said identifier comprises at least one marking formed by abrading said outer surface of said container.

30. The system in accordance with Claim 26, wherein said identifier comprises at least one marking formed by laser-etching said outer surface of said container.

31. The system in accordance with Claim 26, wherein said identifier comprises at least one marking defined by a translucent film material applied to said outer surface.

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